

# Alexander says I-530 aid transportation needs in region

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U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander knows the proposed Interstate 530 connector from Little Rock to Monroe is far from becoming a reality, but he believes it would only enhance the quality of life for northeast Louisiana.

The I-530 initiative is being spearheaded by a group of business and government leaders in southern Arkansas.

Under the current proposal, an interstate highway would extend from somewhere east of Monroe, north to Monticello, where it would intersect with Interstate 69, which is currently under construction.

"We do know that transportation is vitally important for our local economy," said Alexander, R-Quitman.

"I can remember when the interstate came through north Louisiana," Alexander said. "Can you imagine where we would be today if the Eisenhower administration had not said, 'let's do this?'"

"If we can get traffic coming to the new port facility and Ouachita Parish and allow us a transportation network to get those goods and products spread

out, whether it's going or coming, then the better off we will be," he said.

Alexander delivered those remarks Monday at an appearance at the West Monroe Convention Center where he received the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Spirit of Enterprise Award.

Alexander said Congress should contribute as much federal money as possible to enhance the transportation network from Baton Rouge through Arkansas and toward Memphis, Tenn.

"We have not done as much as we should to improve on this weakness," Alexander continued. "We need to draw down on as much federal money as we can to assist in this area. There's some places in the 5th congressional district not 50 miles from here (West Monroe) where they're filming a 1930s movie and they're not bringing many props in because very little has changed. That's very embarrassing, and we need to do something about that.

"Transportation would help there, so we're looking at that (I-530 connector) optimistically, and we think many others will be involved who will look at it with optimism."

Alexander, who has toured the 5th District this past week while Congress

was in recess, said gas prices will continue to be the top issue among national leaders.

"I've been in Congress for about six years now and I don't know how many times I voted for us to drill in Alaska," Alexander said. "The first year I went up there, people asked me why I voted to drill in Alaska. Well, I told them that's how you get the oil out of the ground."

He said there are members in Congress who will not allow drilling off the coast of Florida because there are some who do not want the environment disturbed there. At the same time, not far off from Florida's coast, China drills for oil in Cuban waters.

"There's some serious things that need to be corrected, and I think the public is poised today to force members of Congress, who have been reluctant in the past, to explore where we know there is oil," he said. "The public is putting more pressure on Congress today, and I think you'll see more leaning toward going ahead and taking advantage of some of those natural resources we have."

He said Louisiana has proven that oil can be drilled in these areas safely.